

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	895
Land:	Afghanistan
Kilde:	Jamestown Foundation
Titel:	How Islamic State-Khurasan is Driving Afghanistan Toward Sectarian Conflict; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 16 Issue: 19
Udgivet:	12. oktober 2018
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	17. december 2018

How Islamic State-Khurasan is Driving Afghanistan Toward Sectarian Conflict; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 16 Issue: 19

By: [Waliullah Rahmani](#)

October 12, 2018 04:11 PM Age: 1 week

President Ashraf Ghani condemned Hazara and Shia killings in Afghanistan on September 19 during his visit to India. The president asked for an international investigation of the complex suicide attacks that have targeted the groups ([tolonews](#), September 19). The stance was followed by another address to a gathering of hundreds of Shia Hazara citizens, elders and government officials in the presidential palace. During the address, President Ghani for the first time described the targeted mass killings of Hazaras as a national security threat to Afghanistan ([Khabarnama](#), September 19). This message comes only two weeks after the last suicide attack and vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack that targeted a wrestling club and the subsequent gathering of civilians and journalists at the site. The two attacks left more than 30 dead and over 70 wounded ([khabarnama](#), September 5).

Afghanistan's Hazaras, who are mainly a Shia-dominated ethnicity, and other Shia communities have been the target of complex suicide attacks over the last three years. Islamic State-Khurasan (IS-K) has taken responsibility for nearly all of these attacks. At least 25 complex attacks have been carried out against Hazaras and Shias of Afghanistan in the last three years ([Khabarnama](#), September 6). IS-K tactics in these brutal killings included kidnappings and beheadings, VBIED attacks, and complex assaults on Hazara/Shia mosques, educational centers, sporting clubs, libraries, and public or political gatherings. In claims of responsibility, IS-K has noted that it has targeted this particular community for following Shiite religious practices.

While targeted attacks against Shia citizens have been ongoing for years, it was the latest attack that alarmed the National Unity Government leadership, particularly those in its security establishment. This prompted them to speak loudly about targeted killings of the Hazaras of Afghanistan. The young, newly appointed Afghan National Security Advisor (NSA) Hamdullah Moheb for the first time called the attacks "targeted killings of Hazaras"—whereby Afghan ethnic and religious minority groups have long been the victim of atrocities in Afghanistan ([khabarnama](#), September 8).

This change in Afghan senior leaders' language and the fear of another national security threat emerging in Afghanistan is a sign of the danger posed against the Shia community by IS-K. Some experts in Afghanistan call the current IS-K strategy against Shiites the Iraqization/ Syriazation of Afghanistan, a reference to the rampant sectarian violence in both countries.

Western Kabul: A Ghost City

Dasht-e-Barchi, a populated Hazara community in western Kabul, is a vibrant area previously famous for its stability and high level of tolerance. Being poor with unpaved roads, the area where district 13, 18 and 6 is located has changed to a ghost city, even during the Ashura mourning.

Making up a third of the Afghan capital, Dasht-e-Barchi has been hit by dozens of suicide attacks. At least 14 of the 25 major attacks on the Hazara Shiites have taken place in this western part of Kabul ([Khabarnama](#), August 16). This trend of mass killings of civilians has pushed people to take up arms to defend their mosques and watch over their neighborhoods. Locals have reported that people have taken up arms with approval from the Ministry of Interior and that they routinely fear they will not return from their time patrolling the streets. Armed civilians were particularly prevalent during Muharram ([Afghanpaper](#), September 17).

Many armed Hazara Shiites in the capital of Afghanistan are young and educated, but the feeling of being vulnerable to a new force has motivated the community members to take arms and start their own protection

groups across the western parts of the capital. Currently, this once vibrant community is living in fear. The cafes, restaurants, sporting clubs, educational institutions and even wedding halls can no longer operate due to the risk of being hit by a suicide bomber. As such, there are more armed people seen in the streets and roads of this part of the capital while the area has become a ghost city for civilians.

Another Hasht Al Shaabi or Fatemiyoun?

The Shiite Ulema Council of Afghanistan issued a statement in April 2018 asking the people (Hazaras and other Shiite communities) not to participate in voter registration processes until the people's security is fully granted. The statement read:

We ask all our Muslim people of Afghanistan especially those supporting the religious democracy that considering the upsurge in violence across the country, not to participate in taking ID Cards or voter registration until people's security is granted. Because safety is more important beyond other issues ([Khabarnama](#), April 26).

The statement was issued three days after the bloodiest suicide blast against the group, which targeted a voter registration station and killed 69 and wounded over 120 civilians ([middleeastpress](#), April 23). This blast created anti-government sentiment within the Hazara community, which blames the Afghan security establishment for not taking serious measures to protect the population. The most noticeable action taken was by the Shiite Ulema Council, a body that is created by Afghanistan's senior Shiite clergies and is led by a prominent Shiite Ayatollah Mohseni.

It was after the attack and the council's statement that people lost the courage to participate in voter registration in the western part of capital. Previously, the area had some of the highest turnouts in previous elections, but locals have talked of no Hazara turn-out in the upcoming parliamentary elections ([Khabarnama](#), April 26).

With the current Hazara/Shia Fatemiyoun Brigade fighting in Syria as a proxy force for Iran and looking at the impact of an Ulema's statement on people's attitude in the Afghan traditional Shia community, the risk of Fatwas being issued from grand Hazara/Shiite Ayatollahs in Najaf and Qom cities is increasing. In turn, this will darken the future dynamics of the Shiite community in Afghanistan. Knowing the experience of how Hasht Al Shaabi was created in Iraq in 2014, many believe that a Fatwa from a grand Shiite Ayatollah could mobilize people to take arms in masses. Such an event would create the groundwork for a strong Shiite militia presence across Afghanistan; an issue that would change the strategic calculus of war and impact the current fragile situation of the country.

Risk of a Sectarian War

Increasing violence against Shiite communities across Afghanistan has brought up an emerging discourse that the risk of sectarian war is increasing. This issue has prompted many stakeholders, including the government, to push for more security measures to protect Shia communities across the country.

The measures, however, do not address how to manage the trend of Hazaras arming themselves across Afghanistan. A militia comprised of around 1,000 armed Hazaras in Maidan Wardak province coupled with armed Hazara groups in Ghazni and other Hazara-dominated areas is increasingly supporting the idea that a nation-wide Hazara armed protection forces is forming ([Khabarnama](#), October 2, 2016). Looking to the current trend of the insurgency, it is highly unlikely the government of Afghanistan can stop or prevent further armament of the community. That is a strategy suggested by some Hazara leaders to manage the population-centric mobilized armed groups under the umbrella of the security establishment of Afghanistan. This grand format and strategy could include organizing the current armed Hazara/Shiite groups in various formats including anti-IS-K units and community protection groups ([Khabarnama](#), August 16).

Afghanistan is seemingly on the verge of repeating the tragedies of Iraq and Syria. This trend needs to be stopped in order to prevent a sectarian war in Afghanistan. IS-K's targeting and strategies suggest the prospect of peace is largely unachievable in the near future.